

BACK ON TOP



Photo: Cap America

WITH DEMAND RETURNING FOR TEAM CAPS, AVAILABILITY AND SHIPPING ARE KEY CONCERNS FOR DEALERS. BY CARLY RUSSO

As athletes dust off their caps and return to the playing fields this summer and fall, team dealers thankfully no longer have to worry about whether or not they will have orders to fill, but other concerns take their place — specifically, will those orders arrive on time? Tops among the Summer 2021 challenges is making sure the item that tops it all off — the cap — is part of the deal.

Because as teams prepare for a post-pandemic world one thing is for certain — hats are back on top and the demand for them is alive and well. And as more states feel a sense of normalcy, team dealers who were previously on standby now have cap orders to fill once again.

“I couldn’t be happier to see that kids are back on the field,” says **Jamey Mack**, manager of **Garretson Sports Center**, Sterling, CO.

In Colorado teams are catching up on the seasons they missed and began hosting fall sports during the late spring and into the summer. With that, Mack reports that he’s had no issue with sales, but instead has had to deal with delivery problems and shortages. For that reason, whether he sells custom or stock caps depends on availability, since some products have no expected delivery date in sight.

Customers are for the most part understanding of the situation, he says.

“More and more people are willing to adapt and get orders even if it’s not what they originally wanted,” says Mack, referring to Colorado teams that are happy to get their heads in whatever caps they can since regular delivery dates have been pushed back from the normal four to five weeks to six to eight weeks in some cases. Luckily, teams have no issue modifying their orders, which takes a lot of pressure off of team dealers, he says.

Increased Demand, Questionable Supply

Illinois also felt the unusual circumstance of hosting fall sports in the spring. Like Mack, dealers there have seen sales skyrocket due to the sudden boom of sports coming back; however, custom stock doesn’t seem to be an issue despite the influx of orders.

“We got all these teams that want their logos on caps, so they’re getting them custom,” says **Dave Mallory**, owner of **Mallory Sports**, Wood River, IL.

Mallory reports that football teams in his area got back on the field in March at the same times as baseball and basketball. “All of the sports started out of season,” he says. However, the teams he sells prefer custom caps and filling the orders proved to be no problem.

In California, supplier delays have hurt both teams and dealers. While some counties in the Golden State alleviated COVID-19 restrictions considerably, Los Angeles County still adheres to strict guidelines. For teams in the area, restrictions combined with delays have posed a serious challenge for athletes trying to play ball — and to look good doing it.

“Most cases I would get orders placed and done in two to three weeks. Now when I place an order, it takes over one week to get an art proof, then another three to four weeks to get my hats,” reports **Ryan Jeffs**, owner of **Jeffs Sporting Goods**, San Gabriel, CA.

Jeffs says that the turnaround times from suppliers cost him his all-star business this year, which made matters worse as sales were already down to begin with.

“Orders are down because we have less kids playing because either they, or the parents, are still scared,” he says, pointing out that a number of his schools have half the number of players or, even worse, decided not to play.

As an example he points to a school that would normally fill three teams of 45 to 50 players but this year had only 18 players, enough for one varsity team with lots of younger players. “These teams would get blown out,” says Jeffs, who remains concerned about the ongoing difficulty of putting a team together for schools in the Los Angeles area.

The Rush For Stock

While dealers in other regions are back to normal in terms of sales, availability uncertainty forced some to push stock caps over custom in order to guarantee delivery. Unlike Mallory,



Photo: Augusta Sportswear Brands

many dealers are struggling to get custom orders and have instead found alternative ways to compensate to keep up with the demand.

“We are forced to order stock hats because of tighter deadlines with season schedules being altered this year,” says **Dan Cordi**, owner of **Zappia Athletic Products**, Vestal, NY, who points out that stock hats have posed their own problems with supply chain shortages, slower moving warehouses and shipping carrier delays. “The only part of the process we can control is our in-house embroidery and it has been pushed to the limit.”

In an effort to make up for the loss in custom caps, Cordi’s in-house embroidery department has been working overtime to decorate the stock caps. He reports that some teams didn’t order new caps this year since they never got a chance to wear their uniforms in 2020, but this still did not have a noticeable impact on sales.

“A couple of larger school baseball accounts did not purchase hats this year because they still have them unused from last year,” he says. “However, most accounts ordered as much or in some circumstances more than they normally do.”

This was the case for a Louisiana dealer as well. “Some of the rec leagues didn’t buy more caps and held on to their inventory,” says **Matt Clark**, owner of **Posey’s Sports Center**, Natchitoches, LA. But overall most teams were so eager to play games after COVID ruined the 2020 season they have been excited to order new caps.

Clark, like other dealers, also struggles with supplier delays, which is difficult since his sales returned back to pre-pandemic levels and have been that way for some time. With no choice but to switch suppliers, Clark says going with a different company allowed him to get the inventory he needs.

“I have a bunch of all-star caps coming in,” he says.

The Value of Team Stores

The ease of ordering online has helped team dealers during the pandemic and these online orders don’t seem to be going anywhere.

“Team stores have become vital to our business,” says Clark, who credits online stores to the exponential growth in business he’s seen since the beginning of February. Because of online stores, he now ships orders, including cap orders, directly to consumers, which he’s never done before.

For Mack, online ordering benefits both teams and their family members, especially when it comes to caps.

“I think everything online has become more important,” he says. Whereas parents, grandparents and siblings used to only be able to get team apparel in a store, now they can easily find what they need online, which has contributed to much-needed increased demand. “Online simplifies things for a lot of people,” he says.

Although, the post-pandemic world seems to be just on the horizon, it is still difficult for team dealers to predict the outlook for Fall 2021. With supplier delays slowing deliveries down, it’s hard to estimate just how long the backorders will last.

“Many backorder dates have been pushed back already. It could realistically carry into the fall buying season,” says Cordi. “We are hearing of employee shortages impacting the West Coast loading docks, vendor warehouses and shipping carrier facilities.”

Worry about these backorders extending into the fall appears to be a concern for team dealers everywhere; however, the optimism of returning to “normal” life is keeping some with high spirits as they begin placing their fall orders.

“Several schools in my area had tough seasons. So as of right now my orders are down, but with the hope that schools will be going back here full time in the fall, I expect to have my numbers up in the fall of 2021, compared to the fall of 2020,” says Jeffs.

Like Jeffs, Mack is waiting to see if Colorado will loosen restrictions in the fall. He is preparing for a good season with the expectation of more normalcy to come. For that reason his mind is set on placing his usual cap orders, just as he would have during pre-pandemic times.

“I expect to have normal ordering if everything goes back to normal,” he says. ■

HOT LOOKS AHEAD

THE MAJOR HEADWEAR VENDORS SHOW OFF THEIR LATEST NEW PRODUCTS —AND OFFER SOME ADVICE TO DEALERS.



OUTDOOR CAP

Outdoor Cap is introducing the newest addition to its **Team MLB exclusive Replica Line** this fall. The MLB-600 replaces its Proflex MLB-595 and is equipped with perforated side panels and stocked in 20 MLB home silhouettes. This Proflex caps stretches from Youth leagues all the way into Adult League Softball.

Advice for team dealers: “Push the incremental buys and think about booster and sideline sales as a way for teams to gener-

ate awareness, spirit and more funds,” says Ben Roberts, senior VP—marketing. “Pairing

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booster and sideline sales with the on-field purchase is always a good plan. Even outside of league play, travel ball is growing faster

and faster and PPE may be necessary in different states/counties and cities. Be prepared.”



CAP AMERICA

The **i7045 Performance Slub Cap** (in photo) is made of a poly/spandex blend material — the irregular twists throughout the performance slub fabric create a pattern that suits multiple decoration treatments. It is moisture wicking and has an adjustable hook and loop closure.

The **i8516 Flexfit 110 Jacquard Trucker Mesh Back Cap** is a low-profile structured original trucker cap with shapeable pre-curved visor, hybrid poly jacquard fabric with woven textured front and performance mesh that is moisture wicking. It features a 110 Technology sweatband with adjustable plastic snap back closure. The pattern of the poly jacquard fabric is woven – not printed – into the material.

The **i8503 Flexfit Perforated Performance Cap** is a structured on-field cap with shapeable flat round visor featuring poly/sport blend fabric with perforated sides and back that provides UV protection and moisture wicking properties.

Made in the USA, the **RKS12 Static Pattern Knit Cap with Cuff** features multiple team colors including tri-color options and a knit cuff.

Advice for team dealers: “Dealers should focus on Fall and club baseball, men’s slow-pitch tournaments in August and September, sideline football headwear and spirit wear knits and fundraisers,” says VP—sales for sporting goods, James Matson.



THE GAME

The **GB999 Low Pro GameChanger Perforated Cap**, available this fall, is made of lightweight performance material and enhanced breathability perforation. The Game’s focus in product for Fall/Winter 2021 is in its stock offering and it has greatly increased colors offered within existing styles as well as numerous new products coming available in Fall 2021.

Advice for team dealers: “Definitely get in

front of your coaches as early as possible,” advises Chad Kennedy, national sales

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manager. “Most companies offer early ordering incentives with discounts and/or special terms.

In addition to taking advantage of those incentives it ensures and on time or early delivery as well as reorders.”



AUGUSTA SPORTSWEAR BRANDS

Augusta Sportswear Brands' **Premium A/C² Performance Flexfit Cap** from Pacific Headwear is designed for premium performance. It features a closed back and flat bill for an attractive snug fit, along with a full-profile, pro-model, flat bill, graphite undervisor, pro-stitched finish and a closed back.

Advice for team dealers: "We have taken the immensely successful proprietary FreeStyle Sublimation design platform and brought it over to hats for our Pacific Headwear customers," says Dave

Elliott, CEO of Augusta Sportswear Brands in announcing the mid-August launch of FreeStyle Headwear. It's being called the ultimate headwear design experience that provides customers the freedom to create their style in four easy steps. "We're thrilled to expand this user-friendly platform from sublimation to custom headwear, with some exciting plans to expand it even further in the future," Elliott adds.

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PUKKA HEADWEAR

Pukka has expanded its cap offerings focused on fit, quality, technical functionality, trend and customization. Some of the products for 2021:

• **EcoPiqué** (top left photo) has sustainability and eco-consciousness at its core, made up of 100 percent recycled plastic bottles that have been knit into a classic, textured and breathable pique fabric.

• **BondGo** (bottom photo) is Pukka's modernized logo application — made from one mm thick, soft-touch silicone with a matte finish to give logos more dimension and a crisp, clean look.

• **The Tradesman** is a 6-panel hybrid adjustable hat with blocking that allows for numerous options, with the ability to go full fabric or with a trucker mesh back.

• For **cold weather Pukka's hats** (top right photo) feature new knits, yarn options, jacquard patterns and custom add-ons.

Advice for team dealers: "As a result of supply chain bottlenecks, customers continue to lean on custom caps," says creative director Mike Hiskey. "Plan ahead, allowing yourself four-to-six weeks for delivery of any custom cap orders."

RICHARDSON SPORTS



Richardson Sports' PTS uniforms and teamwear are new for 2021 and it is adding a headwear style to its PTS line — the **PTS50 Matrix**, as a complement to its Matrix mesh featured in its uniforms — in Spring 2022.

Advice for team dealers: "Be proactive. If there's ever been a year where organizations will be easier to convince to place their orders in the offseason, and earlier than before, this is that year," says art director Lane Meadowcroft. "For the foreseeable future, 'at once' is going to mean something

completely different than in previous years. Successful dealers will be working with their biggest and best organizations earlier in the season to help ensure they get what they need and are not left at the mercy of available supply. A lot of products in our industry are going to continue to have longer lead times than normal and there will be a lot of competition on who can get the supply that's actually available." ■

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